

February 15, 2006

**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS' AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN  
NURSING AND FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF NURSING PROGRAMS**

**1. PURPOSE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive defines policy regarding the Secretary of Veterans Affairs' Awards Program for Excellence in Nursing, consisting of three major areas: Excellence in Nursing, Advancement of Nursing Programs by a Medical Center or Health Care System Director, and Advancement of Nursing Programs by a Medical Center Health Care System Nurse Executive.

**2. BACKGROUND:** The Awards Program for Excellence in Nursing was established in 1984. The award categories for Medical Center Health Care System Directors and Medical Center Health Care System Nurse Executives were added in 1993 and 2003 respectively. The Health Care Technician (HCT) was included in the Nursing Assistant award category in 2006.

a. **Excellence in Nursing Award.** The Excellence in Nursing Award annually honors four individuals: two Registered Nurses, one in a staff nurse role and one in an expanded nurse role, (e.g., advanced practice nurse, nurse manager, nurse researcher, instructor, etc.); a Licensed Practical Nurse or Licensed Vocational Nurse; and a Nursing Assistant or HCT. Awardees must be actively engaged in the care of patients at a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility. The recipients' contributions to the care of patients in any VA health care setting must be patient-centered and demonstrate such excellence as to merit recognition from peers. **NOTE:** *An individual may receive each award only once.*

b. **Advancement of Nursing Programs by a Medical Center, or a Health Care System, Director Award.** The attitudes and values of a medical center, or a health care system, Director significantly influence the environment and relationships among health care professionals involved in ensuring quality patient care. Each year this award recognizes one VA medical center, or health care system, Director who has achieved distinction in promoting the VA nursing program, thereby enhancing VA's quality patient care. **NOTE:** *A Director may receive this award only once.*

c. **Advancement of Nursing Programs by a Medical Center/Health Care System Nurse Executive Award.** The skills, attitudes and values of a Medical Center or Health Care System Nurse Executive significantly influence the environment and relationships among health care professionals involved in ensuring quality patient care. Each year this award recognizes one VA medical center, or health care system, Nurse Executive who has achieved distinction in promoting the VA nursing program, thereby enhancing VA's quality patient care. **NOTE:** *A Nurse Executive may receive this award only once.*

**3. POLICY:** It is VHA policy that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs' Award for Excellence in Nursing; the Secretary of Veterans Affairs' Award to a Medical Center; or a Health Care System,

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Director for the Advancement of Nursing Programs; and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs' Award to a Medical Center, or a Health Care System Nurse Executive for the Advancement of Nursing Programs, be awarded annually.

### **4. ACTION**

a. **Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director.** The VISN Director is responsible for ensuring that the criteria, nomination procedures, and selection procedures for these awards are distributed to all VISN medical center, or health care system, Directors and Nurse Executives. The awards are the:

(1) Secretary of Veterans Affairs' Award for Excellence in Nursing (see Att. A).

(2) Secretary of Veterans Affairs' Award to a Medical Center, or Health Care System, Director for the Advancement of Nursing Programs (see Att. B), and

(3) Secretary of Veterans Affairs' Award to a Medical Center, or Health Care System, Nurse Executive for the Advancement of Nursing Programs (see Att. C).

b. **Office of Nursing Services, VA Central Office.** The Office of Nursing Services, VA Central Office, is responsible for ensuring that:

(1) Appropriate announcements regarding the selection process are distributed annually; and

(2) A presentation of a plaque is made to each award recipient at an annual ceremony held at VHA Central Office, Washington, DC, during National Nurses' Week.

### **5. REFERENCES:** None.

**6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY:** The Chief Nursing Officer, Office of Nursing Services (108), VHA Central Office, Washington, DC, is responsible for the content of this Directive. For questions, call 202-273-9237.

**7. RESCISSION:** VHA Directive 99-001, VHA Directive 99-002, and VHA Directive 2003-015 are rescinded. This VHA Directive expires January 31, 2011.

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Under Secretary for Health

Attachments

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ATTACHMENT A

SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS' AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN NURSING

**1. Eligibility.** Two Registered Nurses (RN) (one staff nurse and one nurse with an expanded role); one Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) or Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN); and one Nursing Assistant (NA) or Health Care Technician (HCT), each of whom must be actively engaged in the care of patients at a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility.

**2. Criteria**

a. **RN.** Each of the RNs must have demonstrated excellence in the following seven criteria. Each nominee must have:

- (1) Demonstrated expert nursing practice.
- (2) Established and maintained a personal development plan to support professional career development with demonstrated innovative outcomes in nursing practice.
- (3) Collaborated effectively with other health care colleagues.
- (4) Demonstrated the effective use of evidence-based practice to enhance or improve health care outcomes.
- (5) Demonstrated integrity and adherence to the nursing profession's code of ethics.
- (6) Developed and implemented strategies to improve organizational performance related to resource utilization.
- (7) Promoted the image of nursing and the nursing profession within the community.

b. **LPN or LVN, and NA or HCT.** The LPN or LVN, and NA or HCT must have demonstrated excellence in the following four criteria. Each nominee must have:

- (1) Demonstrated effectiveness in improving and delivering patient care to veterans.
- (2) Worked with the RN and health care team to provide outstanding care to the veteran patient.
- (3) Improved job-related skills through a personal development plan with demonstrated performance improvement.
- (4) Achieved recognition from co-workers for excellence in the provision of care.

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**3. Nomination Procedures**

a. Any VA employee may nominate a local VA nursing employee by a written memo of nomination. For the nomination of an RN, the seven criteria (see subpar. 2a of this Attachment A) must be addressed. For the nomination of an LPN or LVN, or NA or HCT, the four criteria must be addressed (see subpar. 2b of this Attachment A). The narrative must be limited to three single-spaced typed pages, and each element being addressed must be stated as the header for each section.

b. Nominations must be forwarded to the facility's, or health care system's, ad hoc Nursing Awards Committee, appointed by the Nurse Executive. **NOTE:** *The committee is to consist of a minimum of three staff, none of whom are current nominees.*

c. The Nursing Awards Committee, with the Nurse Executive's concurrence, recommends the best qualified nominees in each category to the facility, or health care system, Director. **NOTE:** *Recipients are recognized locally during the annual nursing recognition celebration.*

d. Abbreviations are not to be used, and acronyms must be defined the first time they are used; e.g., Nurse Executive (NE), Associate Director for Patient Care Service (AD for PCS).

e. Nominations must be forwarded through the facility Nurse Executive; endorsed by the Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) Director; and forwarded to the Chief Nursing Officer, VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, by February 15 of each year.

**4. Selection.** An ad hoc committee, comprised of a Program Director from the Office of Nursing Services, and two medical center Nurse Executives, is established annually by the Chief Nursing Officer. This committee is responsible for:

a. Reviewing all nominations received and making final recommendations, through the Chief Nursing Officer and the Under Secretary for Health, to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; and

b. Recommending, at its discretion, appropriate recognition for finalists who were not chosen as recipients of these awards.

ATTACHMENT B

**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS' AWARD TO A MEDICAL  
CENTER/HEALTH CARE SYSTEM DIRECTOR FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF  
NURSING PROGRAMS**

1. **Eligibility.** Any medical center, or health care system, Director who has served a minimum of 2 years in the current assignment is eligible.
2. **Criteria.** Nominees must have demonstrated contemporary and progressive leadership in the advancement of nursing programs, as measured against the following five criteria: Each nominee must have:
  - a. Demonstrated support by facilitating the incorporation of evidence-based nursing practices into the facility's existing nursing program.
  - b. Created an organizational climate ensuring the involvement of Nursing as a clinical practice discipline in the health care facility.
  - c. Identified and facilitated maximum support services to enhance the effective functioning of nursing personnel. *NOTE: This could include human resources and/or advanced technological equipment.*
  - d. Demonstrated, through managerial and supervisory efforts, a commitment to support the full professional role of nurses and to foster career growth and development programs for nursing staff.
  - e. Achieved recognition beyond the medical center for the advancement of nursing.

3. **Nomination Procedures**

- a. Nominations may be made by an individual Registered Nurse (RN), or a group of RNs, employed in the facility where the Medical Center, or Health Care System, Director is employed.
- b. Narrative statements responding to the applicable criteria must be specific in describing the nominee's accomplishments.
- c. Nominations must be limited to three single-spaced typed pages; and each element being addressed must be stated as the header for each section.
- d. Abbreviations are not to be used; acronyms must be defined the first time they are used, e.g., Nurse Executive (NE), and the Associate Director for Patient Care Services (AD for PCS).

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e. Nominations must be forwarded through the facility Nurse Executive; endorsed by the VISN Director; and forwarded to the Chief Nursing Officer, VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, by February 15 of each year.

**4. Selection.** An ad hoc committee, comprised of a VHA representative from the Office of Nursing Services; a facility, or health care system, Nurse Executive; a facility, or health care system, Director (usually the previous year's recipient); and a VISN Director, or designee, is established annually by the Chief Nursing Officer. This committee is responsible for:

a. Reviewing all nominations received and making a final recommendation, through the Chief Nursing Officer and the Under Secretary for Health, to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; and

b. Recommending, at its discretion, appropriate recognition for finalists who were not chosen as the recipient of this award.

ATTACHMENT C

**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS' AWARD TO A MEDICAL  
CENTER/HEALTH CARE SYSTEM NURSE EXECUTIVE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT  
OF NURSING PROGRAMS**

**1. Eligibility.** Any medical center, or health care system, Nurse Executive who has served a minimum of 2 years in the current or present assignment is eligible.

**2. Criteria.** Nominees must have demonstrated contemporary and progressive leadership in the advancement of nursing practice, as measured against the following six criteria. The nominee must have:

a. Created and/or directed the integration of nursing or nursing-related activities in the mutual development and achievement of organizational goals.

b. Provided leadership in the establishment or improvement of programs designed for the delivery of safe patient care. **NOTE:** *Excellence is reflected in improved client outcomes and organizational performance.*

c. Facilitated, and/or established, and maintained innovative recruitment and retention strategies resulting in significant improvement of staff satisfaction.

d. Promoted and actively participated in career development and/or succession-planning activities including mentoring, coaching, and facilitating the utilization of educational resources (i.e., the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Learning Opportunities Program, National Nursing Education Initiative, Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, etc.).

e. Facilitated creative academic partnerships that promoted a learning organization enabling career development, staff retention, etc. **NOTE:** *This includes cooperative educational and/or research initiatives, internships, etc.*

f. Achieved recognition beyond the medical center for the advancement of nursing practice.

**3. Nomination Procedure**

a. Nominations may be made by the facility senior management, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) staff, or by an individual Registered Nurse (RN) or a group of nurses employed in the facility where the medical center, or health care system, Nurse Executive is employed.

b. Narrative statements responding to the applicable criteria must be specific in describing the nominee's accomplishments.

c. The narrative must be limited to three single-spaced typed pages, and the elements being addressed must be stated as the header for each section.

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d. Abbreviations are not to be used and acronyms must be defined the first time they are used, e.g., Nurse Executive (NE), Associate Director for Patient Care Services (AD for PCS).

e. Nominations are forwarded through the facility Director, endorsed by the respective VISN Director, and forwarded to the Chief Nursing Officer, Office of Nursing Services (108), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20420, by February 15 of each year.

**4. Selection.** An ad hoc committee, comprised of a Program Director from the Office of Nursing Services; a facility or health care system Director; a Nurse Executive (usually the previous year's recipient); and a VISN Director, or designee, is established annually by the Office of Nursing Services. This committee is responsible for:

a. Reviewing all nominations received and making a final recommendation, through the Chief Nursing Office and the Under Secretary for Health, to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; and

b. Recommending, at its discretion, appropriate recognition for finalists who were not chosen as the recipient of this award.